

United Nations Documentation : Research Guide



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DOCUMENT SYMBOLS : United Nations Documentation

- ↘ [Document Symbol](#)
- ↘ [Sales Numbers](#)

- ↘ [List of Sales Publication Categories](#)
- ↘ [Official Records](#)

↘ **Document Symbols**

Structure of Symbols

A symbol is a combination of numbers and letters which serves as a unique identifier for a United Nations document. It generally does not give any significant indication of the subject of a document. All language versions of a document carry the same symbol. The first component usually reflects the parent organ issuing the document or to which the document is being submitted:

A/-	General Assembly
S/-	Security Council
E/-	Economic and Social Council
ST/-	Secretariat

Some exceptions occur in the case of bodies for which a special series symbol has been created not reflecting the parent organ. For example:

CRC/C/-	Committee on the Rights of the Child
DPI/-	United Nations Development Programme
TD/-	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP/-	United Nations Environment Programme

Secondary and tertiary components indicate subsidiary bodies:

-AC. .../-	Ad hoc committee
-C. .../-	Standing/permanent/main committee
-CN. .../-	Commission
-CONF. .../-	Conference
-GC. .../-	Governing council
-PCI. .../-	Preparatory committee
-SC. .../-	Subcommittee
-Sub. .../-	Subcommission

-/WG. .../-	Working group
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Special components reflect the nature of the document:

-/CRP. ...	Conference room paper
-/INF/-	Information series (e.g., lists of participants)
-/L. ...	Limited distribution (i.e., generally draft documents)
-/NGO/-	Statements by non-governmental organizations
-/PET/-	Petitions
-/PRST/-	Statements by the President of the Security Council
-/PV. ...	Verbatim records of meetings (i.e., proces-verbaux)
-/R. ...	Restricted distribution; restricted access (unless subsequently derestricted)
-/RES/-	Resolutions
-/SR. ...	Summary records of meetings
-/WP. ...	Working papers

The final component, appearing as a suffix to a symbol, reflects modifications to the original text:

-/Add. ...	Addendum
-/Amend. ...	Alteration, by decision of a competent authority, of a portion of an adopted formal text
-/Corr. ...	Corrigendum (which may not apply to all language versions)
-/Rev. ...	Revision (replacing texts previously issued)
-/Summary	Summarized version
-/*	Reissuance of a document for technical reasons

Examples:

<u>A/55/1</u>	General Assembly, 55th session, document no. 1
<u>A/CONF.157/PC/63/Add.4</u>	General Assembly, World Conference on Human Rights, Preparatory Committee, document no. 63, addendum no. 4
<u>E/CN.4/Sub.2/2003/38/Rev.2</u>	Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, year: 2003, document no. 38, revision no. 2

As of the 31st session (1976), the General Assembly began to incorporate the session number into the symbols of its documents (e.g., A/31/99). Similarly in 1978, the Economic and Social Council began incorporating the year into the symbols of its documents (e.g., E/1978/99); the Security Council began doing the same in 1994 (e.g., S/1994/99), with the exception of resolutions and meeting records.

Guides to Symbols

The following publications are helpful in identifying committees, commissions, etc., by their document series symbols -- and vice versa:

ST/LIB/SER.B/5/Rev.3

United Nations Document Series Symbols, 1946-1977

New York : UN, 1978

iv, 312 p.

(Sales No.: 79.I.3)

(Bibliographical Series/Dag Hammarskjöld Library; No. 5/Rev.3)

ST/LIB/SER.B/5/Rev.3/Add.1

United Nations Document Series Symbols, 1978-1984

New York : UN, 1986

vii, 160 p.

(Sales No.: 85.I.21)

(Bibliographical Series/Dag Hammarskjöld Library; No. 5/Rev.3/Add.1)

ST/LIB/SER.B/5/Rev.5

United Nations Document Series Symbols, 1946-1996

New York : UN, 1998

viii, 764 p.

(Sales No.: 98.I.6)

(Bibliographical Series/Dag Hammarskjöld Library; No. 5/Rev.5)

Date of Document

The date recorded below the symbol of a masthead document does **not** reflect the date of publication of the document itself but the date of issuance by the substantive department. On that date, the document is registered and its processing (i.e., translation, editing, wordprocessing and printing) **starts**. Next to the job number recorded in the lower left hand corner of a document a date in ISO format (dd-mm-yy) can be found which indicates the actual date on which the processing of the document was completed. Depending on the length of the document, there may be a substantial gap between the registration date and the end-of-processing date:

Document Symbol	Title of Document	Date below the Symbol	End of Processing Date
<u>A/55/100</u>	Annotated preliminary list of items to be included in the provisional agenda of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly	15 June 2000	250800 = 25 Aug. 2000
<u>A/S-19/29</u>	Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Nineteenth Special Session [of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21]	27 June 1997	060897 = 6 Aug. 1997
<u>A/48/824-S/26915</u>	Letter from the United Republic of Tanzania [transmitting the Rwanda Peace Agreement]	23 Dec. 1993	070294 = 7 Feb. 1994

The actual date of issuance is defined as the date of the particular issue of the **Journal of**

the United Nations in which the document in question appears. Since it is difficult to investigate when a document might have been listed, the date below the symbol has traditionally been used as the date included in the imprint information. The UN Library also follows this convention in its printed indices and online databases. As far as General Assembly resolutions in masthead format are concerned, the registration date below the symbol should not be confused with the adoption date which can be found at the end of the text. In the bibliographic products of the UN Library, the registration date is recorded in the imprint field whereas the adoption date appears in a note field:

Bibliographic record for document A/RES/52/91 (masthead version of General Assembly resolution 52/91 of 12 December 1997) as contained in UNBIS Plus on CD-ROM

UNBIS Plus on CD-ROM

Copyright (c) 1995-1998 Chadwyck-Healey Inc.

Data copyright (c) 1995-1998 United Nations

A/RES/52/91

Crime prevention and criminal justice. - Preparations for the 10th United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly. - [New York] : UN, 4 Feb. 1998.

3 p.

Adopted at the 70th plenary meeting, 12 Dec. 1997.

Issued in GAOR, 52nd sess., Suppl. no. 49.

Language versions: Arabic; Chinese; English; French; Russian; Spanish.

Distribution: General.

The regulations for the issuance date of documents, which apply to parliamentary documents (excluding meeting records), were promulgated in editorial directive [ST/CS/SER.A/35](#) pursuant to a mandate contained in General Assembly resolution [46/190](#) of 20 December 1991 which, in paragraph 25, requests the Secretary-General and the executive heads of United Nations programmes and funds and the secretariats of United Nations organs "to ensure that each official document carries on its front page and in an appropriate manner the dates concerning the following stages of the documentation process: issuance by the substantive Department; completion of the translation into the specific language; printing; issuance".

[TOP](#) ↑

→ Sales Numbers

Sales publications constitute a highly selective category of publications of general/broad interest which the United Nations offers for sale in order to give them the widest possible distribution outside the UN system; they are identified by sales numbers. A sales number is a combination of letters and numbers (both arabic and roman). The first component (a letter) indicates the language of the publication; the second (two arabic numerals) indicates the year of publication; the third (roman numerals), the subject of the publication or the issuing body in some instances (see: [List of Sales Publication Categories](#)). The final component (an arabic numeral) is nothing more than a sequential number which has no special meaning.

Example: E.95.XIII.12 = World urbanization prospects: the 1994 revision (i.e., an English language title published in 1995 relating to demography)

United Nations Publications disseminates official documents, publications and electronic products of the United Nations and its agencies on demand (contact: http://unp.un.org/howto_customer_service.aspx).

➔ Official Records

Official Records, always identified as such on the title page, constitute the primary documents submitted to or issued by major UN organs at a given session or during a particular year. They consist of meeting records; resolutions; reports of major organs, committees and commissions as well as the budget and financial reports (each issued as a separately numbered "Supplement" and comprehensively listed in [UN-I-QUE](#)); and reprints of other important documents (issued sessionally as "Annexes" and organized by agenda item number in the case of the General Assembly or quarterly "Supplements" listed by document symbol in the case of the Security Council). Official Records are also produced for some of the major conferences (e.g., United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court).

Highly specialized indexes, the [Indexes to Proceedings](#), are available to facilitate the work of researchers attempting to identify both masthead documents and Official Records of the [General Assembly](#), [Security Council](#), [Economic and Social Council](#) and [Trusteeship Council](#). Researchers may also consult [UNBISnet](#), the webcatalog of the UN Library in New York. [UNBISnet](#) additionally provides links to the full text of recent documentation.

Definitions:

"A **document** is a text submitted to a principal organ or a subsidiary organ of the United Nations for consideration by it, usually in connection with item(s) on its agenda."

Source: [ST/AI/189/Add.3/Rev.2](#), para. 2

"The term '**United Nations publication**' refers to any written material which is issued by or for the United Nations to the general public, normally under the authorization of the Publications Board."

Source: [ST/AI/189/Add.3/Rev.2](#), para. 4